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El eterno retorno: latinx youth radicalism and resistance through art

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Vassar College

**EL ETERNO RETORNO:
LATINX YOUTH RADICALISM AND RESISTANCE THROUGH ART**

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Bachelor of Arts in
Sociology

by

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May 2018

El Eterno Retorno: Latinx Youth Radicalism and Resistance Through Art

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Abstract

Motivated by my own belief that students are the most radical population in our society, this thesis documents the experiences of four Latinx youth who were on the track to high school non-completion and found the arts as a tool for academic reengagement. This thesis explores the relationship between art, schooling, and the struggle for liberation and self-determination among Latinx students in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Drawing on scholarship from classical sociology, sociology of education, critical race and raced-gendered epistemologies, namely Chicana Feminist Theory, this work seeks to reframe the scope of what it means to be “revolutionary”, “radical”, or “oppositional”. Using qualitative interview data, I present students’ narratives as nuanced structural critiques and original theory from the margins. In completing this work, I affirm that Latinx students occupy a unique role in the mobilization towards social justice within their communities. Historically and in the present students use creative, non-conventional mobilization approaches that reflect a critical consciousness, birthed out of direct conflict with oppressive schooling practices, which often parallel hegemonic systems of domination in society at large.

Keywords: high school, student, youth, art, education, resistance, radicalism, Los Angeles, LAUSD, alternative education, continuation school, Latinx, Latina, Latino, lived experience

Dedicated to

- ...my family, biological and chosen
- ...educators who believed in me
- ...students with whom I have had the privilege of building community
- ...Black and Brown creatives, across time and space, who dare to imagine new realities
- ...past, present, and future Chicana scholars
- you *are* abundantly talented, brilliant, and powerful.

Thank you for inspiring me before, during, and after the completion of work.

This is for us.

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Acknowledgements

Papelitos guardados evokes the process by which we contemplate thoughts and feelings, often in isolation and through difficult times. We keep them in our memory, write them down, and store them in safe places waiting for the appropriate moment when we can return to them for review and analysis, or speak out and share them with others.

– Acevedo, *Telling to Live: Latina Feminist Testimonios*

The thoughts and feelings upon which this work is built on are, in many ways, the echoes of my own *papelitos guardados*; this thesis is layered upon reflections on self, identity, community, education, art, and culture, that have long occupied the spaces of my mind and heart. It is then all the more surreal that I have the privilege of bringing these intimate *papelitos* into academia. I am incredibly thankful for the individuals, and departments, whose support made this thesis possible.

I must first acknowledge Professor Erin McCloskey, without whom this project would not have been fully actualized. Words are insufficient to fully convey how grateful I am to have worked closely with you this year. Thank you for seeing, and committing to, the vision of this work even when it was just a kernel of an idea. Your encouragement to continue writing even amidst moments of self-doubt and confusion grounded me. Thank you for your wisdom, guidance, enthusiasm, and warmth.

Thank you, Professor Marque Miringoff, for advising me through this process and challenging me to always dig a little deeper. Professor Eréndira Rueda, you have pushed me to grow as a scholar and I am forever indebted to you for your mentorship and counsel. I am grateful for the folks of color, especially women and femmes, whose friendships have sustained me during my time at Vassar. I offer this work as a testament to the tremendous impact of this collective support. Thank you.

Preface



Me standing in front of a painting in *Guadalajara* market in Pomona, CA circa 2002

¹ All photos included in the preface belong to my family's personal collection and were taken by my mom unless otherwise noted.



My family gathered in our backyard for my mom's birthday dinner circa 2001



Dia de Los Muertos *ofrenda*² in downtown Pomona storefront, staged by my mom, circa 2002

² Translates to “offering”; an altar constructed to honor, celebrate, and welcome back our departed ancestors.



Photograph of my late father, Lance Perez, on an *ofrenda* circa 2001



My godmother, cousin, and me on Easter cracking *cascarones*³ circa 2002

³ Translates to “shells”; a cascarón is a hollowed-out chicken egg filled with confetti.



My cousin and me dancing in traditional ballet folklórico and mariachi dress at my grandma's 85th birthday dinner circa 2010



Downtown Pomona plaza mural depicting the Pomona Goddess⁴ as a woman of color

⁴ Pomona is the goddess of fruitful abundance in Roman mythology; she watches over and protects fruit trees and cares for their cultivation. For more about the history of Pomona see the City's website section "About Pomona" here <http://www.ci.pomona.ca.us/index.php/about/about-pomona>.



Downtown Pomona mural of *La Virgen* “Our Mother” on the side of a business wall



Downtown Pomona alley artwork



Graffiti style art on the side of a smoke shop



Sacred Heart Church, a keystone in my grandma's neighborhood in South Pomona.



Pomona School of Arts and Enterprise



Mural on the side of *Mi Mercadito*



A close up of a mural titled "Generation 9/11" by Pedro A. Pelayo © 2002 across from Philadelphia Elementary School



5

Me and my mom at my pre-school “graduation” circa 2000

⁵ The photographer of this picture is unknown, though it was likely one of my family members or a parent of a fellow classmate.



Me, graduating as Valedictorian of my high school class, celebrating with my mom. Captured by Eric Perez © 2014, professional photographer not related to my family.

The first artist I ever knew was my mom. She is a photographer. The picture lady. I grew up with my entire childhood documented through a lens. The cabinet next to our refrigerator was full of film canisters and stacked Kodak packets of photos. Below a clock in our kitchen hung a framed photo of *pan dulce* my mom developed in black and white and manually colorized herself. Our living room displayed prints of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera's paintings. Every birthday, holiday, and family gathering were opportunities for my mom to practice her craft and in doing so she was also capturing a memory of our family, our culture, and our existence at that particular moment in time.

My mom and my entire maternal family, sacrificed more of themselves than I will ever know so that I could even be writing this thesis today, and it is with that I acknowledge my position as a beneficiary of a private high school education, as someone who will be seen as the "exception" to the systems of oppression I critique because of the credentials I will hold upon graduation from this elite private college, and as a person who shares so much with *and* at the same time is worlds apart from the students centered in this thesis.

I have come to understand myself and my relationship to others, and the world, in large part through the visual landscape of my home city of Pomona. Located about 40 minutes south east of the city of Los Angeles, Pomona is one of the 88 incorporated cities that make up L.A. County. According to the 2010 U.S. Census, we have nearly 150,000 residents, of whom 70% identify as Hispanic and 60% of whom are Mexican.

When I imagine home, I bring to mind the crowded Pomona Swap meet on Indian Hill, car shows at the Fairplex lined with lowriders and motorcycles, rows of liquor stores and pawn shops on Holt Avenue and Mission Boulevard, and the countless Chinese fast-food restaurants, *taquerias*, *eloteros*, *mercados*, and *panaderías*.

When I imagine home, I bring to mind the stunning murals I catch on the sides of buildings, the unique lettering and designs painted on auto shops, the neon sign of the Fox Theater, the art galleries on 2nd street, and the graffiti on railroad cars by the lumber yard near my grandma's house.

I think of palm trees in the wind, religious processions through the streets in honor of *La Virgen*, the tops of the San Gabriel Valley mountains reaching towards the sky, salsa concerts at Ganesha park, yard sales on a hot summer day, running barefoot after the ice cream truck with my cousins as sweat drips down our foreheads, watching my grandma covered in flour rolling tortillas, the smell of water hitting the concrete while my mom waters our grass...the sun is setting but it is still warm out...I'm sitting on our porch watching her...my cat, Sabino, runs up next to me...the sounds of *banda* music play next door...our neighbors wave at us from across the street.

Everything about my city, my home, and my family is articulated through a particular visual vocabulary. The way that my community lives and survives and creates culture is art. The way we gather and celebrate is art. Our religions. Our traditions. Our food. Our leisure. It is *all* art. The specific visual vocabulary I am gesturing to is not necessarily legible by all and it is not meant to be; the imagery is given meaning because of the context in which it is read and experienced and, of course, influenced by the perspective from which the onlooker is coming from. Put another way, some of this art is explicitly transgressive while other more quotidian forms may be judged as politically void, though that would be a mistaken assumption. I am surrounded by creatives; artists who constantly are creating spaces, memories, and experiences that challenge the presumed undesirability and disposability of communities like mine.

As a child I saw my mom navigate life as a single parent without a college degree who often struggled to maintain full time employment; sometimes our utilities were shut off when we got back home and overdue bill notifications flooded our mailbox. But, my mom never shared these burdens with me; instead she and the rest of my village⁶ used everything they had to give me a world in which I felt that anything was possible. Amidst stress and uncertainty my mom remained committed to pursuing a life of dignity, joy, and freedom for herself and her daughter. She cultivated my passions for dance, music, and writing; she indulged my intellectual curiosities and affirmed my complex personhood⁷. It has been such a gift to witness my mom learn and unlearn new ways of being – to articulate her own critical consciousness, though she would never name it that. She and the women in my family, my grandma and godmother, passed this critical awareness of the world down to me long before Vassar introduced me to the words I use to write about it in this thesis.

My mom embodies resilience. She is unconventional and creative. Her spirit is boundless. Her reluctance to accept the norm is fierce. She survives within the system but exists completely outside of it. Her hope and energy inspire me to pursue liberation – both personal and collective. I remember when my mom gave me her old digital Canon camera; she taught me how to hold it, adjust the focus, and select the right mode. We would take photos together – as a team. I would show her my pictures and she would critique them, giving me advice on how to better capture the subject matter. She partnered with me on this section of my thesis, going through our photo albums and around our city to curate a visual experience that would bring

⁶ Thinking of the proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child.”

⁷ Thank you, Patricia Hill Collins for gifting us this language.

readers into our world, even if only for a moment. Photography is one of *our* things. We share a photographic eye and that eye allows us to see, frame, and interpret reality differently.

In sharing this reality, with which I am most intimately familiar, I emphasize that I can only speak *my* truth and in doing so hope that it provides insight into what has drawn me to this research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

I have chosen to examine the role that art plays in the development of a critical consciousness, the construction of identity, and the formation of community among Latinx⁸ youth, specifically students who were “at risk of dropping out”⁹ of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). My work focuses on the narratives from a select group of four students from alternative education schools who received arts education classes, provided through a nonprofit servicing the district. This work differs conceptually from its precursors within the literature and research from the fields of Education and Sociology; it is a departure from a protocol of knowledge production on the topic of high school “dropouts” and schooling, in so far as that I attempt to create a conversational piece, in which dominant and subversive histories, personal and collective memory, and the academy, come into a space together, that is, at times, contradictory and messy.

I build on the intellectual work put forth by Chicana and Latina feminist scholars that aims to excavate theory from lived experiences. I want it to be clear that in large part I am calling into question the deep-seated inequality within U.S. school systems that pushes out Latinx youth, however I acknowledge that inequality is by design¹⁰; I take as a given that education has been an apparatus for white supremacist colonial projects.¹¹ I move rather to interrogate *how* students

⁸ Latinx is a gender-neutral and inclusive alternative to Latina or Latino.

⁹ I use quotation marks to connote the tensions I have with this normalized language. I align myself with Eve Tuck (2012) who reframes “dropouts” as youth who have been “pushed out” or compelled to leave school by people and factors inside the school (Tuck 2012:1). This reframing seeks to center how high stakes standardized testing and curricula, policy design, the school to prison pipeline, and zero tolerance rules, all intersect to produce unequal choices and outcomes, specifically for low-income youth of color.

¹⁰ For a critical discussion about the adverse effects of high stakes standardized testing culture see Wayne Au’s book titled *Unequal by Design*.

¹¹ I recognize the ways in which schools can simultaneously be “effective” and “honest” whilst still inflicting harm (Fine 1991:8). As social and political institutions, schools have a continued

most directly impacted by systems of subjection come to an awareness of their social position *and*, if at all, resist it - namely, through art.

I utilize the term “subjection” defined by Dean Spade (2011) as “the workings of systems of meaning and control such as racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, and xenophobia” (p. 5). Rather than position the subjects of this thesis as a passively dominated group of people I apply Spade’s discussion on subjection, to explore “how we know ourselves as subjects through these systems of meaning and control - the ways we understand our own bodies, the things we believe about ourselves and our relationship with other people and with institutions, and the ways we imagine change and transformation” (2011: 6). In other words, I frame the insights these young people offer through their interviews, lived experiences, and their art as products from a critical sociological imagination, which C. Wright Mills (1959) defines as the capacity to grasp the world, history, and individual biography as they relate to each other and within the broader context of society. He writes,

We have come to know that every individual lives, from one generation to the next, in some society; that he lives out a biography, and that he lives it out within some historical sequence. By the fact of his living he contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he is made by society and by its historical push and shove. (P. 111)

I affirm that it is a radical act to come into this awareness; to openly question the presumed legitimacy and authority of hegemonic socio-political institutions; to begin actively understanding and shaping one’s own position within the larger temporal landscape of history,

commitment to purposes rooted in social inequality (Katz 1987:144). That is to say that, at all levels, schooling was never designed for low-income students of color (Fine 1991: 31). This is not to undermine the very real benefits and access schools provide to students but rather offer a clear critique of a system which has, and continues, to serve the interest of the white supremacist upper middle class.

particularly as a racialized person in the U.S. and, specifically, as youth, which is a population often seen as devoid of such awareness and agency because of age.

Using the 1968 East L.A. Walkouts as a reference point, I move across time and history through the vehicles of education and art. I look at the Latinx students in L.A. the 1960s and Latinx students now to understand the ways art can capture a unique political narrative. Most centrally, I ask, how are marginalized Latinx students negotiating their identities and sociopolitical positions in this moment, given the complex histories of Latinx youth activism in Los Angeles? That is to question, what are Latinx youth imagining as possible futures for themselves? How do their visions of future realities compliment, complicate, or contradict hegemonic messages disseminated about what is expected of them?

The 1968 East L.A. Walkouts, and larger Chicano¹² Movement¹³, provided evidence for the importance of documenting narratives from the margins. This work for me looks to engage these histories, questions, and the contemporary moment to affirm that Latinx youth are, and have always been, self-aware visionaries at the forefront of liberation movements. My thesis statement, then, put another way, affirms that Latinx students occupy a unique role in the mobilization towards social justice within their communities. Historically and in the present

¹² I use Chicano for historical consistency when referring to the Chicano Movement but opt for gender-neutral and inclusive language in the rest of my writing by using Chicanx. The Chicano Civil Rights Movement can be described as “an umbrella term referring to several distinct, more or less simultaneous efforts to end discriminatory practices against, improve the living conditions of, and provide multiple future opportunities for Americans of Mexican descent” (Barnet-Sanchez 2016:27)

¹³ The constraints of this assignment do not afford me the space to fully engage with critiques I have of the Chicano Movement. However, I would be remiss not to be explicit in saying I do not wish to romanticize this Movement because it, like all things and people, is flawed; Chicano-Mexican nationalism, *machismo*, homophobia (re: transphobia), and anti-black racism were all underlying motivators within the Movement. What I focus on from this time period is the awareness and critiques of social, political, and economic inequality that Latinx students developed, which spurred them into collective action.

students use creative, non-conventional mobilization approaches that reflect a critical consciousness, birthed out of direct conflict with oppressive schooling practices, which often parallel hegemonic systems of domination in society at large.

In the preface to the fourth edition of *This Bridge Called My Back*, Cherrie Moraga observes, “I see how desperately we need political memory, so that we are not always imagining ourselves the ever-inventors of our revolution” (Anzalúda and Moraga 2015: xix). Her words speak to the core philosophy of my work; we are never the first nor are we the last. There are creators who came before us, who stand alongside us, and who will continue the work after us - all existing simultaneously through their words, visuals, and stories - their art. In this way, we are constantly engaging in the production of culture and knowledge across time and space; knowledge that is critical to the way we move in the world, to our survival.

I believe there are historical moments of insurgency that need to be recorded - this is one of them. I venture to document the lives of four young creatives actively seeking to transform the world we live in and by doing so I hope to add to, and complicate, the ever-evolving collection of histories from the Latinx diaspora.

My work is comprised of 6 chapters. I conclude this introduction with a brief history of Los Angeles to provide a context for readers who may not be familiar with the histories and spaces with which this work engages. Chapter 2 serves as a combined theoretical framework and literature review. I offer readers a sense of what theory informs the way I approach this research and aim to ground readers in a foundational understanding of power dynamics in U.S. society. Chapter 3 details my research methodology. Informed by critical raced-gendered epistemologies, my research design is intentionally exploratory. I gather qualitative interview data from four LAUSD alumni who participated in arts education programming through a nonprofit partner of

the district. Chapter 4 begins with an overview of the Los Angeles Unified School District followed by a description of LArt, the non-profit I constructed this case study around, and concludes with vignettes of each of the interview participants. Chapter 5 is an analysis of the data collected. Major themes I focus this analysis around include authentic care, counter-school culture, and youth agency. Chapter 6 offers my concluding thoughts on this work.

HISTORY OF LOS ANGELES

In March of 1968, over ten thousand students walked out of high schools in East Los Angeles. These “blowouts” were in protest to racist teachers and school policies, the lack of Mexican teachers in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the erasure of Mexican and Mexican American culture in the curriculum, and the inferior quality of education provided to Mexican American students (Muñoz 2007). School failure among Chicanos is not a surprisingly new situation but, rather, an old and stubborn condition (Valencia 2002:3). According to the U.S. Census Bureau, less than 40% of Hispanic persons 25 years of older completed 4 years of high school or more between 1960-1970 (U.S. Census Bureau 1999).

The explosive events of 1968 represent a culmination of political antagonisms that are part of a long history beginning with the very settlement of El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de Los Ángeles (Barnet-Sanchez and Drescher 2016:28). Originally home to the Chumash and Tongva native peoples, the land we know as present-day Los Angeles has been, and continues to be, a site of colonial violence and exploitation. The end of the Mexican American War and Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 allowed the United States to acquire over 500,000 square miles of territory from Mexico, which included the present-day states of Arizona, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Utah, parts of Colorado and Wyoming, and California. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo

is critical to contextualize the creation of a racial classification system that failed to incorporate native, non-white peoples.

The term Hispanic was created by the U.S. Government in 1980 as a Census classification to group individuals who come from Spanish speaking countries. This term is largely disputed because it is *not* a race; a person can be White - Hispanic, Black -Hispanic, Asian - Hispanic, and so forth. Latinx, a gender neutral and inclusive alternative to Latino/a/@, is also incomplete and insufficient; referring to individuals in the U.S. of Latin and Central American descent, Latinx has emerged as a pan-ethnic marker of identity. Lastly, Chicano, was a historically a pejorative term reclaimed by Mexican-American activists who took part in the Brown Power movement of the 60s and 70s in the U.S southwest; it is a chosen identity for some second and third generation Mexican-Americans living in the U.S and is of particular relevance to my thesis as Los Angeles was, historically, a Mexican and Chicanx community. The contentious nature of race among Latinx folks in the U.S. is of central concern but one that, because of the confines of this project, will not be explored more deeply; it is critical that readers understand that moving forward, I utilize Latinx and Chicanx and fully acknowledge the limitations of language; I recognize the tensions with using the term Latinx and do not employ it as a “homogenized...idealized, unified national/ethnic heritage” nor is it exhaustive of the many complicated ways people identify (Acevedo 2001:6).

As aforementioned, the histories of Mexican, Mexican-American, and Chicanx folks are intimately connected with that of the city of Los Angeles. The 2010 Census recorded that of the 1.8 Latinx L.A. residents, 1.2 million self-identify as Mexican. While certainly comprising a majority of the Latinx population it is critical to note, however, that, contrary to dominant discourse, not all Latinx folks are Mexican; 11% of Latinx folks in L.A. identify as Central

American, namely from Guatemala and El Salvador (Saldivar 2016). This demographic shift can be attributed in large part to the intervention by U.S. federal government and military forces in Central American countries that have led to the displacement of thousands of Latinx folks and created push and pull factors for mass migration. Forced segregation in the United States led to the formation of *barrios* (Diaz 2005). The U.S. government on both federal and local levels intentionally constricted the social rights of Latinx people “through a series of tactics like poll taxes, language competency exams, and gerrymandering... Mexicans were hampered from participating fully in the political process and inhibited from addressing their needs” (Quiñones and Vásquez 2014:38). Made worse by endemic real estate speculation, redlining, and systemic abuse by landlords in the *barrio* rental market, barrios became cyclically entrenched in poverty (Diaz 2005:34).

The mass mobilization of students from Lincoln, Roosevelt, Garfield, Wilson, and Belmont High Schools was a key event in Mexican history and in the history of the LAUSD, a point at which Latinx youth actively demonstrated a critical oppositional consciousness. As students, activists, and creatives, youth organized amongst themselves and deployed various forms of art (e.g., posters, journals, newspapers, publications, performances) to educate themselves and their communities on the issues at stake¹⁴. At the time of the protests, art did not have the luxury to remain solely for private consumption but, rather, took on an instrumental educative function in the social and political struggle for economic, educational, and personal security (Ávila et al. 2011).

¹⁴ For a full list of the demands made by students see United Way L.A. timeline <https://www.unitedwayla.org/en/news-resources/blog/1968-walkout-demands/>

In the aftermath¹⁵ of the Walkouts, 13 students were indicted with felony charges on accounts of conspiracy to disturb the peace, each facing 66 years in prison; the indictments were eventually struck down by the court of appeals in 1970 (Sahagun 2018). In considering the effects of student mobilization, “there have been several developments, including desegregation, bilingual education, affirmative action, multicultural education, Chicana/o studies, better school financing, migrant education, and much more but, still students and their families continue to feel underserved and dismissed by institutions of education” (Ávila et al. 2011:2).

The enduring tension between Latinx youth and mainstream U.S. societal structures over time has, in large part, been articulated through a racist education system.¹⁶ That is to say, that schools are a site in which white supremacist, nativist, and classist, hegemonic structures are reproduced (Perez-Huber 2011). Put another way, schools not only reflect existing socio-political structures, but they also actively inscribe new meanings and classifications. Thus, I am invested in examining schools as a point of penetration into the matrices of domination.

¹⁵ For an interactive map of important sites during the 1968 Walkouts see L.A Curbed’s article titled, “The East LA blowouts of 1968 mapped” <https://la.curbed.com/maps/east-los-angeles-walkouts-history>

¹⁶ Again, contrary to what is popularly believed (via myth of meritocracy and upward social mobility), high school educational attainment exponentially solidifies already existing privilege while marginally improving the opportunities and outcomes of individuals whose race/ethnicity, class, gender, and geography renders them at a socio-political and economic disadvantage. Though there is indication that educational attainment does provide opportunity for mobility *within* a social class the possibility for mobility into a different class is less secure (Fine 1991:23).

Chapter 2: We Move Forward by Looking Back

Utilizing a multidisciplinary approach, my work bridges scholarship from classical sociology, sociology of education, anthropology, and cultural studies. I also draw from critical race and raced-gendered epistemologies, namely Chicana Feminist Theory, which ground the perspective from which I approach this project. The following is a review of existing literature on societal power dynamics and the reproduction of power, in order to provide a context for understanding the processes of domination and marginalization that shape the realities of Latinx folks, specifically students, who are the focus of this thesis, in the United States.

CRITICAL RACE AND CHICANA FEMINIST THEORIES

As Latinx people in the United States our everyday existence is racialized; our socioeconomic and political subjugation are the effects of white supremacy. It is absolutely necessary, then, to employ a Critical Race theoretical framework as a basis to approach discussing the marginalization of Latinx students.

Developed out of legal scholarship, the multidisciplinary framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) seeks to study and transform the relationship among race, racism, and power. According to the UCLA School of Public Affairs, “CRT recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of American society. CRT identifies that existing power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. Derrick Bell, Alan Freeman, Richard Delgado, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Harris, Charles Lawrence, Mari Matsuda, and Patricia Williams are some of the most notable writers in the field. From CRT, LatinoCrit (LatCrit), Asian-American jurisprudence, and Queer-Crit, have emerged. Daniel G. Solórzano defines critical race theory in education as “a framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seek to identify, analyze and transform those

structural, cultural, and interpersonal aspects of education that maintain the subordination of scholars of color” (1998:23).

CRT looks to the systemic causes of marginalization, thus countering deficit-thinking and other fallacious articulations of blaming the individual, that ultimately evade identifying the root problems of subjugation. Moreover, a tenet of CRT is storytelling, the process of bridging worlds, humanizing, creating empathy, and disrupting dominant cultural narratives through participants’ voicing their stories (Delgado and Stefancic 2001). My research approaches art as a type of storytelling. I couple CRT with the work of Chicana Feminist Scholars such as Gloria Anzaldúa, who asserts that art is about identity, among other things, and that *creative acts are more than mere aesthetic exercises - they are forms of political activism* (1990: xxiv, emphasis added).

In 1987 Gloria Anzaldúa, a queer Chicana poet, writer, and feminist theorist, transformed Border Theory scholarship and mobilized the critical advancement of Chicana Third Space Feminist investigations across disciplines with her memoir. When she wrote *Borderlands: La Frontera*, Anzaldúa did not anticipate the level of acclaim and positive reception her work would receive. Rather, the principal intent behind *Borderlands* was to speak her truth and grapple with the uncomfortable and contradictory elements of inhabiting a body with multiple identities. Anzaldúa took to writing as a tool to negotiate her life and struggles with “Self” as a woman living on borders and in the margins (Anzaldúa 1987). In many ways, the intentions behind my work mirror hers; I have chosen to dedicate my thesis to exploring what “Self” means for me, students like me, students different than me, and for the multifaceted communities I find home in. Anzaldúa’s writings actively challenge dominant culture and ideology by explicitly questioning what constitutes “theory”. Anzaldúa (1990) asserts,

Theory, then, is a set of knowledges. Some of these knowledges have been kept from us— entry into some professions and academia denied us. Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is vital that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow white men and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we *transform* that theorizing space. (P. xxv, emphasis added)

I want this thesis to push readers towards expanding their own pre-conceived ideas of how “theory” takes shape, especially when it is being produced through non-dominant forms such as *testimonios* and art from young folks. Cherrie Moraga, who co-edited *This Bridge Called My Back* with Anzaldúa, an anthology of writings by women of color, introduced “theory in the flesh” to give name to the sorts of knowledge produced through our lived realities, realities that are excluded, devalued, perverted, or essentialized (2015:19).

Both of these writers brought to the conversation the importance of valuing the everyday experiences of the most marginalized - taking the lived realities of oppressed folks as rich interpretations of what it means to exist in the world that offer insights into our collective being. It was this key idea which gave birth to my thesis.

RESISTANCE AND AGENCY

Interested, then, in the concept of a critical consciousness, I define it broadly, drawing from key sociologists and educational theorists, particularly from the fields of CRT and Chicana Feminist Theory. I establish critical consciousness to refer to a state of identifying, naming, and understanding oneself as a historical subject, and thus a product of hegemonic forces with which one has an ongoing relationship, whilst at the same time recognizing and activating the agency one has to redefine this relationship. Most simply, it is to both be aware of the physical realities of occupying a particular set of identities in relation to hegemonic powers and, most importantly,

to embody a “critique of oppression and a desire for social justice”, which can be understood as “transformational resistance” (Solórzano and Bernal 2001:319).

Antonio Gramsci defined hegemony as ideological domination or “the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent” (1971:80). Gramsci argues that everyone is a philosopher and carries with them ways of making sense of the world in response their own subjugation (1948:58). He asserts that an important point of penetration into the matrices of domination is the development of critical thinking, or a way of knowing yourself as an individual and historical subject, so as to question how our lives are embedded in the production of culture, knowledge, and history.

Gloria Anzaldúa used the term *la facultad* to describe the “capacity to see in surface phenomena the meaning of deeper realities, to see the deep structure below the surface” (1987:60); a “sensing” or acute awareness granted to those who are the least “safe” in this world - the most marginalized and othered. Put another way *la facultad* is “a survival tactic that people, caught between the worlds, unknowingly cultivate” (Anzalúda 1987:61). It is this capacity which I am interested in exploring further through the lives of the four participants in this research; I entered this project fully expecting that such a consciousness would be articulated differently for each individual and that in those spaces of difference would lie key insight into complicating the notion of “radical”, “revolutionary”, and “oppositional”.

Nicholas Garnham asserts that identity formation and cultural practices are not random (1995:30). This approach centers the agency individuals have; people are not simply fooled or manipulated by outside forces but rather there is a constant exchange and reinterpretation of culture. Thus, if political power rests upon cultural hegemony then part of the revolutionary project is creating a counter hegemonic culture that is not imposed from above but from the

experiences and consciousness of the people (Gramsci 1948:58). Thinking, then, of schools as specific sites of cultural reproduction we can also assume that they are rich sites in which oppositional and counter cultures are developed, often in community.

REPRODUCTION THEORY

Marginalized groups are oppressed as a result of deeply embedded structures which ensure their continued oppression over years. These structures are highly adaptable and take into account changing social and economic times; systems of oppression, rooted in white supremacy, are malleable and ever evolving in their manifestation yet persist in maintaining a stratified racialized society. Regardless of exceptional individuals, it is important to recognize that on a larger scale, Latinx folks in the United States are subject to a myriad of social, economic, and political disadvantages.¹⁷ Sociologists have studied this passing down of disadvantage, emphasizing the macro-structural forces which ensure the transmission of inequality between generations.

Pierre Bourdieu and Karl Marx form the foundation for reproduction theory. Their concepts and theories have been applied by subsequent scholars to explain how certain groups in society face persistent marginalization. Karl Marx's analysis of the capitalist society in Volume 1 of *Capital* produced one of his most key sociological insights. He posited that "every social process of production is at the same time a process of reproduction" (1867:71). Marx's theory is generally referred to as the base-superstructure model which argues the economic infrastructure (i.e. capitalism) as the primary determinant of the cultural superstructure (e.g. state, family, ideology, law, mass media, religion, etc.) (Morrow and Torres 1995:10). Reproduction theory

¹⁷ For detailed data about income inequality among Latinx communities see the Congressional Joint Economic Committee Report titled "The Economic State of The Latino Community in America." https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/96c9cbb5-d206-4dd5-acca-955748e97fd1/jec-hispanic-report-final.pdf

can then be broadened to encompass all social processes by which structures reproduce and maintain power relationships in society.

Anthropologist John Ogbu's work (1987) affirms Marx and Bourdieu's theory by suggesting that the evolution of a tradition of inferior academic performance has been made possible by structural forces. Ogbu posited that inferior education is a result of inadequately trained teachers, inferior curriculum, lack of funding, and poor facilities, which persist despite, in some cases, being legally abolished (1987: 318). Therefore, he concludes, unequal education is *not* reoccurring because of *individual* attitudes but because of *deeply embedded macro-level structures* that ensure intergenerational inequality. In this way, U.S. schools prepare students to participate in existing institutions and to believe in the social and economic systems already in place (Bowles and Gintis 1976:324). Carlos Tejeda (2011) articulates an observation of this socialization by writing,

The forms of schooling for subservience practiced and perfected throughout the history of racial domination and capitalist exploitation in Anglo-American society function at the service of today's social and cultural domination; and that without the effective workings of a schooling for subservience, the type of social, political, cultural, and economic hegemony enjoyed by the dominant classes in American society would not be possible. (P. 13)

Put most simply, U.S. social and economic systems are legitimized through exchange of capital in schools, by valuing students who have, because of generational reproduction, white, middle-class knowledge systems, ways of being, skills, and resources.

Social, Cultural, and Human Capital

Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1973) introduced the concepts of social and cultural capital defining them as resources that exist through social networks and the cultural background, disposition, knowledge, and skills that can be passed down from one generation to another, respectively. Scholars, including Critical Race Theorist Ricardo D. Stanton-Salazar (1995),

James S. Coleman (1988), and Min Zhou and Carl L. Bankston (1998), have dedicated their research to examining how different forms of capital operate and most importantly, have offered explanations as to how groups without capital succeed or fail in acquiring it.

Ricardo Stanton-Salazar refers to social capital as the social relationships from which an individual is potentially able to derive institutional support, support that often includes the transference of knowledge-based resources (1995:119). Social capital is defined by its function, meaning, like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that would not be attainable in its absence (Coleman 1990:302). For example, mentorships between teachers and students can lead to letters of recommendation for college or employment, introductions to other key influencers, and access to information or resources that will serve the student's academic and professional growth. Most simply, social capital is an individual's network of people who at some point become essential in achieving a goal, whether that goal be personal, professional, academic, economic, and so forth.

However, the complexities of social capital arise when considering that these relationships operate on an unspoken level, governed by unwritten rules, which require a specific knowledge to decode and understand. In order to fully activate social capital, an individual needs cultural capital or what Bourdieu (1973) calls "tools of appropriation". Bourdieu (1973) defines cultural capital as a competence, which includes the knowledge, understanding, and practices of a dominant and socially valued culture. This competence manifests itself through networking, or what he calls apprenticeships, and education. Social capital is what most education reform approaches tend to focus on by emphasizing the role of mentorship and relationships with "gate keepers". For example, nonprofit education programs will often pair students with a mentor, who is an experienced professional in the student's field of interest with the intent that students will

gain insight into the industry of their choosing but also, more importantly, develop a relationship that will “get their foot in the door” regardless of the student’s economic or cultural capital.

Dominant cultural capital is most widely systemically disseminated and legitimized through the institution of schooling. Bourdieu (1973) identifies the role schools have in further solidifying inequalities; education reproduces cultural capital because the culture of education is most in line with dominant i.e., white, upper-middle class, culture. He states,

In short, an institution officially entrusted with the transmission of the instruments of appropriation of the dominant culture which neglects methodically to transmit the instruments indispensable to the success of its undertaking is bound to become the monopoly of those social classes capable of transmitting by their own means...and thereby to confirm their monopoly of the instruments of appropriation of the dominant culture and thus their monopoly of that culture. (P. 494)

Bourdieu (1973) writes that the education system reproduces the culture of the dominant class, without granting access or opportunity for those in the lower class. Thus, cultural reproduction lends itself to social reproduction, social reproduction being the process of social and economic structures being reproduced generationally thereby perpetuating inequality.

Economists and social theorists such as Sam Bowles and Herb Gintis (1976) expressed that minorities are not just receiving an inferior education but that they are systemically receiving an education that funnels them into low-level jobs and unemployment. Through the fallacious idea of meritocracy, rewards and punishments, tracking, and rigid school day structure, disadvantaged students, like those in alternative education tracks, are socialized to remain disadvantaged in the labor market by internalizing, or accepting the belief, that their “failure” is a fault of their own. Muñoz (2007) observes the creation of a stratified work force noting that “Mexican American working-class youth have therefore been subject to a socialization process that reinforces the dominant ideology and undermines competing ideologies” (32).

Researchers such as Angela Valenzuela (1999) and William Labov (1972), have examined the curricular and pedagogical cultural incongruence reproduced by traditional schooling which negatively impacts Latinx student performance. Racialized youth do not have inferior mothers, language, or experience, but that their language, family style and ways of living are significantly different from the standard culture of the classroom, and that such difference is not always properly understood by teachers and psychologists. Labov (1972) refers to this misunderstanding as cultural incongruity, which explains the disconnect that marginalized students, particularly low-income, immigrant, students of color feel between their home life and the dominant culture in schools.

A key finding from Valenzuela's (1999) work on Mexican-American students in Houston, Texas is that framing the disproportionate numbers of Mexican-American students dropping out as inevitable human differences or intellectual deficits serves to *justify* inequitable schooling practices and structures. This is to say that by perpetuating the fallacy that Latinx youth are inherently, biologically, inferior - less smart, less capable, deficient in some way, etc. - schools are no longer accountable to adjust or improve their practices to support these students. This type of racialized framework is rooted in deficit thinking, which originally used genetics to explain perceived intellectual differences between white and non-white students (Jensen 1969). Deficit thinking is one of the most prevalent forms of racism in U.S. schools today (Yosso 2006).

Students who are typically framed as lazy or underachievers, are in fact, not oppositional to education, but rather to the processes of schooling which makes it nearly impossible to succeed. Alternative education students are usually framed as unmotivated and disposable yet, as I will explore, these students are products of a system which has refused to holistically invest in their skills and interests. Valenzuela (1999) refers to the divestment of youth from important

social and cultural resources, which consequently sets them up for academic failure, as “subtractive schooling”. Through neglect, hostility, and prejudice, schools actively hurt Latinx students by not reinforcing students’ native language, skills, and cultural identity.

All forms of capital, within a U.S. context, are tools for economic mobility and security. People with already high levels of economic capital rely on human, cultural, and social capital in order to maintain their already high level of economic capital or to acquire more. People with more capital set the norms and sanctions by which we abide by in order to obtain capital. The struggle to procure capital, for marginalized people, is a struggle to become more independent within a system that strips away their agency. For students of color, particularly low-income Latinx students and immigrants, obtaining capital through education is seen as the most logical route since our education system is, fictitiously, promoted as the great equalizer.

The paradox is that acquiring capital and using capital only reinforces the need for dominant forms of capital, further solidifying cultural dominance of mainstream institutions. This is because of the aforementioned macro-level structures at work; economic capital is attained through cultural and social capital however, the latter are unequally reproduced intergenerationally, a process by which social reproduction consequently forms a nearly unbreakable cycle of privilege and power and poverty and disenfranchisement (Bourdieu 1973). We can then use reproduction theory to understand the why and how Latinx students remain disproportionately in the lower percentile of high school graduates, advanced degree holders¹⁸, and high-income earners.

¹⁸ For data on educational attainment see the U.S. Census Bureau “Educational Attainment in the United States 2017” <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2017/demo/education-attainment/cps-detailed-tables.html>

Stigmatized as dropouts, working-class youth of color have historically been assured of continuing the same path as generations before them in the ranks of the unemployed and underemployed lower-class (Muñoz 2007). Schools serve as “agents of cultural imperialism” in that they actively erode indigenous cultures of the Southwest and at the same time, through tracking, push racialized youth out of the classroom in order to ensure a cheap labor force (Muñoz 2007). In sum, the process of schooling is generally seen as neutral, yet as I have demonstrated, schools act as a microcosm of larger society and thus the cycle of inequality is even more pronounced within the classroom. My research, described in the following chapter, explores how four former LAUSD students actively combatted this cycle of disenfranchisement.

Chapter 3: Purposeful Praxis

Informed by the work produced by Latina feminists and scholars of color, my approach to research continues the tradition of centering storytelling as the key point of entry into the process of theorizing. Latina *testimonios*, like those in *Telling to Live* and the anthologies of Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzalúda, are the creative endeavors of women in the margins who use writing as a vehicle to inscribe their stories into history (Acevedo 2001). Critical Race Theorists employ storytelling in the courtroom to both understand how race is constructed and experienced in the U.S. and to cultivate empathy in those who hold the privileges protecting them from experiencing oppression (Solórzano and Stefanic 2002: 37). Daniel G. Solórzano and Tara Yosso expand Critical Race Theory by offering what they call Critical Race Methodology, which I use as the foundation for my research design. They define this methodology as one that both foregrounds race and racism and reveals the intersections between race, class, and gender while challenging traditional research practices through offering a transformative alternative that focuses on the experiences of students of color, through storytelling, as a source of strength (Solórzano and Yosso 2000:24). Their term “counter-storytelling” refers to stories not often told by dominant society; these stories are grounded and contextualized in real life but told through “composite” characters developed in real-life experiences and actual empirical data (Solórzano and Yosso 2002:36). Unlike these researchers, the counter stories I include in this thesis are not composite characters but are actual accounts of lived experiences from four individuals.

Within this framework, storytelling is a powerful tool to counter dominant narratives while simultaneously serving a possible cathartic or healing function for those silenced (Solórzano and Stefanic 2002:43). Most importantly, true to my research, Critical Race

Methodology contextualizes the experiences of students of color in the past, present, and future and strategically uses multiple methods, often *unconventional* and *creative*, to draw on the knowledge of people of color who are traditionally excluded as an official part of the academy (Solórzano and Yosso 2002, emphasis added).

In an effort to bring to the center the stories and lived experiences of Latinx students in the LAUSD, I draw on qualitative interview data to broaden the scope of storytelling to include, in addition to writings and oral narratives, the art that these students elect to share with the world.

METHODS AND PROCEDURE

In June 2017, I attended a conference for my summer internship which convened over one hundred other young people interning at arts institutions and organizations across the Los Angeles area. I was particularly interested in a breakout career session led by Jessica Davis¹⁹, who spoke about her work as the Communications Director at LArt²⁰, a non-profit arts education service provider that works primarily with students of color in the LAUSD who are at risk of “dropping out”. I was immediately drawn to learn more about their programming because I was not familiar with organizations doing comparable work; there exist many arts education nonprofits in Los Angeles but none, to my knowledge, with such a targeted mission. In the fall of 2017, I emailed Jessica to ask if LArt would be willing to partner with me on this project. I requested access to conduct interviews with alumni and staff members and to do a field observation of one of their classrooms. Over the course of two weeks in January 2018, during my

¹⁹ All participant names have been changed to protect participant identity.

²⁰ The true name of the organization has been changed to protect participant identity.

winter break, I had the opportunity to interview four LArt alumni and visit an LArt classroom to witness their program in action.

Participants

Participants were selected using convenience sampling, a type of nonprobability sampling method; through the LArt alumni email database, Jessica put out a call for participants which detailed my project and provided two dates with 30-minute slots for interviews.²¹ I conducted interviews with 4 alumni, 3 of whom identified as male and 1 as female; participants identified as Mexican, Latinx, and/or Hispanic. I also interviewed the LArt Artistic Director, Sergio Rodriguez, to get a sense of his role in the organization and how he has come to view the program, students, and communities being served.

Interviews

Interviewing is a powerful tool for understanding meaning, lived experience, and complex emotions and perspectives (Gordon 2016:27). It was my intent to deeply understand how these participants navigate their world and make meaning of their identities as students, artists, folks of color, and individuals inhabiting a multitude of other positions (Gordon 2016:26). Theoretical questions that framed my interviews included: How are educational outcomes informed by the structures of race and ethnicity? How have Latinx students interpreted, internalized, and responded to their marginalization? What can be understood about interlocking systems of oppression in the U.S. by closely investigating the art and activism produced by Latinx students? What role does art play in construction of identity for youth of color? How can art capture a unique political narrative?

²¹ See Appendix A for exact language used in this email.

I conducted semi structured interviews, which are interviews with a predesigned set of questions that are generally asked with each participant but perhaps with varying order or wording (Gordon 2016:23). The list of prepared questions was meant to guide the conversation but not dominate nor limit it. The flexibility afforded by semi structured interviews, as opposed to structured, allowed for the participants to provide as much or as little detail about a certain topic as they wished and encouraged a more natural flow of conversation with my follow up questions building off of and informed by what the interviewees offered. Most importantly, I chose to conduct interviews with the research participants to allow them to tell *their* stories on *their* terms. Put another way, complicated stories cannot be accurately represented by a list of restrictive questions on a paper, such as a survey.

Interview Protocol

Interviews were conducted in the art lab of the LArt office in downtown Los Angeles, a space that all participants knew well and felt comfortable in. After introducing myself, participants were given time to read and sign the adult consent form.²² This form provided a statement of purpose for my research that was meant to be transparent about the nature of this project but not create bias that would lead or pressure participants to respond a certain way; I was sure to be explicit in my briefing that the project was not a reflection or evaluation of LArt and that participants should feel comfortable responding as candidly as possible. The participants were informed that at any point in the interview they could opt to not answer a question, take a break outside of the interview space if needed, or end the interview completely. Audio of the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants; real time transcribing can often be distracting so audio recording served the dual purpose of creating a reliable reference and

²² See Appendix B for the consent form.

allowing me to be fully present and engaged with the interviewee. Participants were debriefed at the end of each interview at which point they were welcomed to voice any remaining questions or concerns they might have, which were not recorded. In order to maintain confidentiality, audio files of the interviews were saved and uploaded to a file on a password protected computer only accessible by me, the researcher. In my writing, I use pseudonyms to keep all participants' identities anonymous. I have also changed the true name of LArt.

Interview times ranged from 25 minutes to 1 hour. Participants were prompted to reflect on a number of aspects related to their identity, art, and education. We explored their childhood upbringings, experiences as students in the LAUSD, time in LArt programs, their personal and professional aspirations, and current occupations.²³

LIMITATIONS

In the early stages of this project I envisioned myself conducting interviews with current LAUSD students. However, gaining access to interview minors posed numerous possible logistical complications and liabilities. For this reason, I chose to focus on interviewing recently graduated alumni of the LAUSD who had gone through LArt programming at their alternative education high schools.

The limited numbers of participants and sampling method in this study affects the generalizability of my project as the individuals included in my project are not representative of any population group as a whole. I am not particularly concerned with this limitation, since in many ways I am more invested in understanding the process than in the product itself (Freire 1994:16). This study, exploratory in nature, is not meant to offer a definitive consensus on the experiences of Latinx students but rather serve as a starting point to begin a conceptualizing the

²³ See Appendix C for the full list of questions.

relationships between ethnic identity, race in the U.S., the process of schooling, and the production and consumption of art.

I, as a researcher, also take into consideration that participant responses may have been affected by my own identity as a Chicana, as someone who did not attend high school in the LAUSD, and ultimately, as an outsider of the organization and LArt community.

My writing process included an initial draft that profiled each participant and detailed their experience. However, I realized that I had unintentionally spoken over the participants; in anticipating what I thought readers would be most interested in knowing from the interviews I had failed to center the participant's voice in my writing. My revised draft was crafted to make readers feel as though they had met each participant just as I had and experienced the full interview alongside me. Ergo, rather than reinterpret, I include nearly all of the original text directly from the interview transcriptions. Remaining highly critical and self-aware of my own subjectivity, I did not want for their stories to be misrepresented. For this reason, I also chose to utilize a member check, a technique that solicits participant feedback to check the accuracy of the data. Each person was emailed a single document, with only their interview information, asking them to review if quotes were out of place, if there were areas they wanted to elaborate, or sections they would prefer to omit or clarify. After two weeks, two of the four participants responded, both with overwhelmingly positive reactions; the only request, which I could not accommodate for reasons related to confidentiality, was made by Ysmael who wished to use his true name because he "would love to be out there."

Chapter 4: Powerful Possibilities of Self-Actualization

Remember that consciousness is power. Consciousness is education and knowledge. Consciousness is becoming aware. It is the perfect vehicle for students.

– Yuri Kochiyama, Asian American activist who dedicated her life to the fight for human rights and against racism and injustice.

ABOUT THE LAUSD

With more than 640,000 enrolled students across 900 schools and 187 public charter schools, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) is the second largest school district in the nation (LAUSD 2018). According to the L.A. Unified Fingertip Facts from the 2017-2018 school year, the District's student body is 74% Latino, 9.8% White, 8.4% African American, 6.0% Asian, .04% Pacific Islander, and .02% American Indian/Alaskan Native, of which 92.5% are English learners whose primary language is Spanish. Combined normal day enrollment, including independent charter schools and affiliated charters, is 168,331 students for grades 9-12. The LAUSD offers 94 senior high schools, 54 option schools, and 120 other schools and centers. As of 2016, graduation rates have dramatically increased, bringing Latinx graduation rates up to 76%. However, these students still fall behind their white peers, whose graduation rates stand at 84%, and Asians, whose graduation rates are even higher, at 87% (California Department of Education 2017).

Within the LAUSD there are multiple pathways to receiving a high school diploma, some of which include enrolling in occupational and skill centers, at home or online independent study, community day schools, continuation schools, adult education centers, and specialized charter schools, all of which can be collapsed under the umbrella term "alternative education". Opportunity education tracks can be identified as "first step intervention" since they are not permanent placements. Rather, students enrolled in opportunity education schools can be

assigned for full day or partial instruction time during which they are offered a specialized curriculum, guidance and counseling, psychological services, and tutorial assistance and may at some point return to their comprehensive school sites upon improvement (California Department of Education 2016). Opportunity education programs serve students in grades one through twelve who are “habitually truant from instruction, irregular in attendance, insubordinate, disorderly while in attendance, or unsuccessful academically” (California Department of Education 2017a).

Defined by the California Department of Education, continuation education is “a high school diploma program designed to meet the needs of students sixteen through eighteen years of age who have not graduated from high school, are not exempt from compulsory school attendance, and are deemed at risk of not completing their education” (California Department of Education 2017b). As of the 2017-2018 school year, there were 4,270 students enrolled in LAUSD continuation and opportunity schools. Additionally, Occupational and Skills Centers, according to the District Office of Transition Services, allow students to make up credits that are transferrable to their school of residence. For students who have aged out of compulsory attendance, there are various programs that couple on the job training with charter school instruction so students can complete their high school education. Of course, there are also unique options for parents, expecting parents, and full-time employed students.²⁴ In reviewing school enrollments by race and ethnicity it is evident that Latinx students are disproportionately over

²⁴ For a more comprehensive guide to alternative education placements in the LAUSD see <https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib08/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/214/ESCs/ISIC/Directories/Alternative%20Educational%20Placements.pdf>

represented in alternative education schools and at least 70% of students are classified as socioeconomically disadvantaged at any given option school.²⁵

ABOUT LArt

In the Los Angeles County approximately 20% of students drop out of high school every year, of which the majority are disproportionately Black or Latinx. In 2017 the median earnings of young adult high school completers were 22 percent higher than those of young adults who did not complete high school (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics 2017). Founded in the 1990's, LArt is a non-profit that aims to combat the epidemic of high school dropout in Los Angeles by academically reengaging students through the arts. Working exclusively within alternative schools, the organization currently reaches over 600 students through classroom workshops across 26 school sites at continuation schools, county community schools, camps, halls, and charter schools for transition-aged youth 18 to 24 years old. Sergio Rodriguez, artistic director, offered the following mission statement of LArt, "[we seek to] Reconnect young people who are at risk of dropping out, for a multitude of reasons, we try and reconnect them with their own curiosity and the process of passionate learning through the arts with the goals in mind of graduating high school, having a plan for the future after high school, and be able to see the big picture of adulthood as well". LArt offers a sequential program with four levels: classroom workshops, afterschool residencies and leadership development, scholarships, and alumni support.

The core of LArt programming is the Level 1 classroom workshops. LArt partners with alternative education schools to provide both optional and mandatory, for-credit, arts classes

²⁵ For a list of all LAUSD high school accountability report cards, with information on enrollment and demographics see <http://search.lausd.net/cgi-bin/fccgi.exe?w3exec=sarc.select&which=sh>

taught once a week by professional artists. Their curriculum is inspired by thematic content relevant to L.A. that is in conversation with prominent institutions across the city. For example, this year The Autry Museum of the American West housed an exhibit on the Chicano Movement entitled *LA RAZA*, from which LArt created ‘Voices of a Movement’ to explore the role youth played in community journalism; with the Japanese American National Museum LArt asks “how can art represent a collective memory?” taking into consideration the power of monuments; the third partner institution is the Los Angeles Public Library from which students are asked to delve into science fiction to envision alternate futures. This model of curriculum design underscores the importance of cultural relevance and community engagement; “those are three conversations that are happening in our city that we think are really crucial that our students bring a unique perspective to...and we want their voices to be heard”, Sergio Rodriguez said. The 11-week workshops series culminates in a trip to their respective institution, where students have the opportunity to present and display their art.

After Level 1, students who are highly motivated to continue learning can elect to participate in Level 2 programming which introduces students to 12-week internships and residencies across fashion, visual arts, and music production. Students identified as “exceptional” by the program may be selected to receive scholarships towards summer and weekend programs with competitive art and design centers and universities. Upon graduation, LArt alumni are encouraged to continue working with the program to develop strategies and pathways to careers in the creative industries and college. Sergio emphasized that familiarity and community building is an indicator of long term student success with their summer internships and for that reason, their scaffolding or ladder model offers the best chances to ensure their students develop confidence and comfort with the transition into new environments and spaces.

Stanton-Salazar and Dornbush warned that when lack of access to institutional funds of knowledge is combined with perceptions of discrimination, self-elimination is a likely result (1995:118). LArt believes that the arts have the potential to academically reengage students who have been relegated to the margins because the arts are “hands on and minds on”; by reaching different capacities and skills that traditional models of teaching do not LArt seeks to develop the transferrable skills of “hustle”, “grit”, “emotional resilience”, “authentic collaboration and the knowledge of “invisible codes” through the process of art making that will, hopefully, make students successful in any sector.

The following pages present the stories from four former LArt students who recount their experiences within the LAUSD and how art has changed their lives. Mireya, Josiah, Emilio, and Ysmael reflect on their past, present, and look towards what the future holds for them as young artists.

Mireya

With her backpack half slung over her shoulder, completely entranced by the music flowing through her ear buds, Mireya danced into the LArt lab to find me wrapping up an interview with Sergio. I sensed her bubbly personality from the moment she entered the space; she immediately smiled and half laughed, seemingly slightly embarrassed she began apologizing for interrupting, which I assured her was not an unwelcomed intrusion. Sergio embraced Mireya in a hug while inquiring about the most recent updates in her life, asking if she had checked in with the rest of the LArt team, and reminding her how eager they all are to see her. The ease of the moment felt so familiar, like when you come home to your family after being away for a long while. Once Mireya was seated adjacent from me, I took note of her green dyed braids, slightly faded, and thick framed black glasses.

Everything started since I was a little girl. I lived in a world which was violence and drugs and mostly my parents would be fighting. Growing up it was really bad. There were times I couldn't even stand it. I just wanted to escape from it. I went to school and they taught us how to draw and I would imagine stuff. I would imagine a happy family, a happy kingdom, a princess - you already know, stuff like that. That's when I decided to make another type of life which I could always keep in my mind. I continued drawing and dancing, which eventually helped me find my path. Art has always been like - like, let's say I have personal problems, I would always end up making a drawing to help me overcome all of my obstacles. Then little by little music came in. It was music that motivates me to continue what I want to do, which is dancing. Then poetry came in. Through poetry I figured out I like writing, I didn't even know I like writing. Then I sculpted and I didn't know I like to build things. The more I grew up, the more art I found, and I knew more about myself; I realized I can be anything I want.

Mireya was introduced to the arts as early as elementary school, during which she took basic sketching, painting, and sculpting classes.

In school they started opening programs about like sketching and painting, which I mean I really didn't want to be home so I thought, 'might as well' ...and so I would take the paper to my mom; my mom would just sign it and be like 'okay go have fun.'

Growing up in East LA, she saw graffiti around her neighborhood; though she considers tagging²⁶ a form of artistic expression, Mireya acknowledged that some people may see it as “nasty writing on the walls.”

Art has a responsibility to change the world in some way for other people. If you look the world right now you see trees, people, and pollution. But, if you see the world through art you see a frame to draw in. Art can change other people’s point of view.

But, she added, “I don’t want to say this or that because some people don’t consider it [art] that way.” Ultimately, Mireya emphasized that art is a way “to escape” or “see a better life” - that is the purpose of art for *her*. She stressed that art has served as an outlet for self-expression, “to get out of the real world for a little bit.” All of a sudden, the grim realities of the world seem bearable - more than that, there is almost beauty and *possibility*. Art changed Mireya’s world. Formerly on the track to non-completion, Mireya described how she was “dropped” from her comprehensive LAUSD school, likely for reasons she believed to be related to her behavioral and criminal records.

I got out of the LA district for the reason that they dropped me ‘cause they didn’t want me there no more ‘cause I guess criminal records and the way school had me as - so I got kicked out of LAUSD, which then after I went to two continuation schools.

After attending two separate continuation schools, Mireya is, as of last fall, proudly, the first in her family to have graduated from high school. So, what changed for her? Mireya attributes her accomplishment to the mentorship and guidance she received from LArt.

I had two team members from LArt who helped me a lot whether it was a personal problem or I needed a job or I needed to get everything in one certain piece y’know – like just trying to find who I am and who I’m not. So, the support that I felt [made a difference]. Also, they knew I was interested in certain subjects so they tried to get other programs for me to get into to keep myself busy. They always got me to do more than I

²⁶ Tagging is a form of graffiti that usually refers to signing your name however the two terms have become interchangeable. For more about this art form see *Graffiti and Street Art: Reading, Writing, and Representation in the City* edited by Konstantinos Avramidis and Myrto Tsilimpounidi.

would expect of myself, which helped me a lot. I actually got my self-esteem a little bit more up; I got more uh, what's the word? Uhm, confident in myself, yeah.

For the majority of her educational career, Mireya was told that she could not achieve her dreams; this negative self-image was in large part informed by the disparaging attitudes of her teachers who belittled her, and her classmates, because of their ethnicity. "You're a Hispanic, don't have big dreams" or "Being a Latina is like trash", she was told from her *teachers*. Upset at being talked down to, Mireya would speak up yet never felt that she was heard. She remembered angrily,

That's the reason why I always had a problem with school. I always got up and said something and I ended up walking out because teachers didn't like it.

The strong bonds she developed with two LArt workshop coordinators were key influences in her high school completion; it was the smallest gestures like daily texts reminding her to go to school that communicated a genuine sense of investment in her success and accountability that fueled Mireya to attend classes on the worst of days.

They would check up on me and say 'are you okay?' 'are you in school?' and I would say 'no' and they would tell me 'get up and go to school be there now' and honestly, thanks to them I didn't drop out of school because I was to the point where I thought, 'I'm done. I need to work. I need to work.' But, then they told me 'you prefer minimum wage now instead of more later?' So, I started to think. They always kept me on track. When I told them I wanted to drop out they didn't let me.

She lamented about years of sitting in classes that were banal and uninteresting, completely void of stimulation,

They wouldn't teach anything they would just write things on the board and say 'there you go start working' or they would just make us read a book. And, for me, I don't think just reading a book is going to make us learn something

Instead, LArt workshops provided the critical stimulation and encouragement needed for Mireya to focus and recommit to her creative and academic work. She recalled enthusiastically, "LArt teachers are always awesome. The thing that made them awesome was the fact that they would

always tell me ‘you can do better - bump it up!’” Though she is talented at drawing and music, at her core Mireya is an aspiring dancer who finds inspiration by blending her passion for music and movement. With a larger than life imagination, she appreciates the intricacies of self-expression across mediums and disciplines; she described how in sketching, or dancing, or making music, she connects more deeply with herself - a process of self-discovery. When asked to describe what makes art special she replied, “The feeling of creating. The way you can express yourself. The tiniest little detail. It’s all just magic.”

Coming from a world of “violence and drugs” she wanted an outlet, a way to break out of the day-to-day; drawing and dancing opened up a space for her to cope, heal, and transform. Through her artistic practice, she has envisioned her best self and best life a million times over, each articulation playing with the balance of fantasy and reality - the two become almost indistinguishable through her art. As a self-described fighter, Mireya is resilient. She is the opposite of what the LAUSD told her she would be; she is a creator. She loves, and succeeds at, bringing things into the world. Mireya thrived off of the extra push from LArt teachers who, in her opinion, saw and valued her potential and intelligence.

Her choice to pursue a full-time career as an artist has proven to be a lonely road at times. Wondering if her close circle of friends were mostly fellow creatives, I asked Mireya about who she surrounds herself with.

Friends right now? Not really. I decided to run solo for a little bit, y’know how when you grow up it’s like you have to get people away from you if they’re not going to be good for you. I guess ‘cause I graduated, I kind of grew up a little more, they [her old friends] started saying ‘you’re just a freak’ and I said, ‘I don’t need this’

Her family was also initially hesitant to accept her dream of becoming a professional artist.

My mom first thought it was dumb. She was like ‘you’re not going to get a career in that you should just become a nurse you’re going to get more money that way’ but as time went on I told her what I want to do and eventually she’s like ‘okay if that’s your dream

go ahead I'm not going to stop you'. But my brothers and my sisters, are still like 'you're dumb' or 'art is just for you to draw at home not for a career'

In response to the pessimistic attitudes of her siblings, and even previous friends, she said, "knowing that if I already graduated, [I'm] the first one who broke the cycle already, I know I can do more I know I *can* take art as a career. Josiah, also the first in his family to earn a high school diploma, offers his perspective on life, school, and art in the following pages.

Josiah

I rose and greeted Josiah, who stood many inches taller than me. Wearing a t-shirt, jeans, and a simple gold chain, Josiah from the beginning to the end of the interview calm, relaxed, and very easy going. Succinct in his initial responses, Josiah prompted me to rethink my questions in the moment in order to make space for deeper reflections. The shortest of my interviews, the conversation was less than 30 minutes yet tremendously powerful. Josiah's journey through the LAUSD has been a "rollercoaster of emotions" he recounted, "It was kind of a mixed experience for me. There were years that I liked school and years that I didn't like school." His interest in classes was heavily influenced by outside factors, like family, that affected his level of motivation and engagement in school. He said, "It's just my mentality at the time. Different stuff happens in your life and you're in a different state of mind." Josiah grew up in neighborhoods in East L.A. where Latinx poverty and unemployment were prevalent.

I'm the first to graduate to actually get a diploma the rest of my family got like the GEDs when they were locked up so I'm the first to get an actual high school diploma.

His innately curious nature was not met with equal enthusiasm from his teachers in comprehensive LAUSD schools. The most important thing to him for his education was to learn something new every day, something he did not feel he was getting from the majority of his teachers.

I study things. I look at things a lot. I'm curious. I ask a lot of questions. The most important thing for me was like if I'm going to school it better not be a waste of time.

He wanted a school experience that would consistently introduce him to new topics, ideas, and histories but this type of engagement was overlooked in favor of standardized and sterile curricula and practice. He emphasized that in large public schools the classes are so massive that students' individual interests and needs are disregarded. Time and time again, throughout the

interview, Josiah circled back to the importance of personalization, which he felt was a strength of LArt classes. He stated,

They're like more interactive I guess you could say. And there's way less people. So, they have more focus on you 'cause in a big classroom you can't focus on everybody but like since it's a small room and there's only a little bit of kids they can give more attention.

He clarified, "When I say attention, I don't mean just focusing in on you, I mean making the experience personal." It was at his last of three continuation schools that he was introduced to LArt. Immediately drawn to the smaller, more intimate classes, Josiah embraced his mandatory classes for art credit then pursued music production and leadership classes after school, held at the LArt office. Initially, he did not see himself as an artist among other LArt students since the majority were visual artists.

LArt made me realize artists, they're unique they're not like everyone else. My first day I was sitting here looking at everybody thinking 'I don't belong here' 'I don't fit in right here' because everyone was talking about painting and stuff and I don't know how to draw or anything I suck at drawing and I was like I make music but I found similarities between drawing and music. The emotion stuff. When people draw, it's based on their emotions. When I'm making a song, it makes me more self-aware of how I feel at the time.

As a child, Josiah was exposed to a variety of music, but mainly rap, and from the young age of six, he began creating music. He laughed while reminiscing about the likely trivial and childish nature of his songs back then but was very appreciative that his parents indulged his creative inclinations at the time.

My mom and dad would play a lot of rap music and that's what made me start liking it. They were supportive. When I was like six my mom had a friend who had a studio and I was six so I would write verses but they would be like little kid stuff immature stuff y'know but my mom would go along with it like it was real music. She took me to her friend's house and I made a song. I was six so you can imagine how it sounded.

Through LArt he honed in on his ability to work with digital software.

I don't play instruments but I make music on internet software. First, I go onto the software, Ableton and make a beat. When I make the beat, I try to think of something I would like to hear. And then I write my lyrics to the beat and record it in the studio.

Now, his work is virtually all online, using social media platforms and websites like soundcloud to promote his music to LA teenagers and connect with other artists in the LA area. When asked about the role of such technologies he asserted, "the internet is very important. It's the main way how I advertise and get out there."

I questioned why he focuses on promoting his music to an L.A. audience, as opposed to a more national or global audience, to which Josiah explained, "It's [L.A. city] really cultural. There's a lot of different experiences. Different stories. It's like a melting pot". Collaboration is one of his favorite aspects of making music; he described how he enjoys bringing together different people, mainly young folks like himself, to create one, unified, piece. For Josiah, the purpose of music is "to get your story heard" or to "speak for other people who can't get their story heard". Describing his own music Josiah said, "I tell it how it is. Like, growing up ghetto. Growing up poor. I like I bring a reality to it. I rap about how life really is." Thinking about LArt classes, he reflected on how art-making requires some level of vulnerability.

The kids at my school they thought they were too cool for it. I would tell them, 'you're not too cool for art.' A lot of kids at my school had a different opinion. They would be like 'oh LArt is here dammit'. But not me, I liked it.

He continued,

People are too scared. Too shy. Too nervous. The kids at my school had an image to maintain and I guess making art wasn't part of that image.

The process and product of artmaking disrupts the preconceived images we have of each other, and ourselves. His first LArt Leadership classes were surprising because he entered a space in which people were talking about their aspirations. Skeptical at first, Josiah found great comfort and inspiration in the environment

[It was] a unique experience. Everybody is not really used to being in a room and talking about different things and feelings and stuff like that but here you here you can do that. Everyone comes with the same mentality that it's a safe zone so everyone says stuff they wouldn't usually say in a regular school so when you have like 10 or 12 people doing that it calls for a good conversation y'know.

He believes that arts education, and the LArt model, can and should be applied more broadly.

When thinking about his future Josiah reflected,

You love your community you grew up there but you feel like it's not for you, that's how I feel. I love my community. I love where I grew up at but at the same time there's nothing there for me.

He continued,

Right now, I'm applying²⁷ for SAT's, looking for a job, I mean everyone has to start somewhere. In the long run, I see myself successful. Not a lot of people from my family can say they're successful, so that gives me motivation to be successful...so I can be the first.

I had the pleasure of listening to a clip of Josiah's music on soundcloud after the interview. His passion for lyric writing and music composition was unmistakable. Like Josiah, Emilio initially felt hesitant to claim himself as an "artist" since his work is not visual. Emilio is a writer whose upbringing is a bit unlike Josiah and Mireya's.

²⁷ He is applying to take the SAT's in anticipation of applying for, and enrolling in, college.

Emilio

I was talking to one of the other interviewees when I looked over to see someone waving through the glass window of the LArt lab. Emilio zealously greeted me with a handshake and a pseudo-formal introduction, “I am *sure* you know who I am, you were expecting me right?” he said. Emilio is a self-defined social and open-minded person. His identity, upbringing, and general life experiences can be, as he put it, described as “diverse”.

I am a pretty active and social person. I am not one to push away people if they ever want to talk. I am very open-minded. I take time to look and understand people. It usually comes to my head that not everyone has the same issues. Throughout my life I have had to learn different lessons from different people which has built my character to be more open minded and more understanding of the various experiences possible through the eyes of different people.

Growing up in West Hollywood in a predominantly non-Latinx neighborhood, Emilio was led to believe his Latinx, Japanese, and French ancestry and residential community made him “whitewashed”

I grew up in a different area. Instead of growing up in East LA or Echo Park I grew up in West Hollywood with American and Russian people. It was a bit complicated. I barely met anyone that was from the same race as me. I had to explore my culture by traveling around the city. But my mom tried to show and teach me our culture. I was against learning Spanish for the longest [time] but have come around to it. I was surrounded by a lot of non-Mexican people. So, I didn’t understand cultural ethnic parties like quinceañeras. Hanukkah was a thing for me, growing up around Jewish people.

As a child he found it difficult to relate to other Mexican people; he didn’t connect with the language or culture and felt a slight sense of discomfort, or confusion.

My family wasn’t ordinary. They didn’t struggle. They didn’t have to deal with what other people’s parents and grandparents. When I hear people saying, ‘oh my grandpa worked picking fruits’ I would say my, ‘my grandma worked doing hair for fashion models’

This discomfort was amplified when he moved from West Hollywood to East L.A. and, eventually, South-Central L.A.

The first high school I moved out of because of my grades. The second school I left was because I was moving at the time so I had to find a closer school in Hollywood. Then from there it was more about the emotional problems I developed, like anxiety, during the move. I was in West Hollywood for 13 years and going from there to East L.A. was hard. I was leaving the area I was most comfortable in. It became difficult to cope with. That eventually caused issues in school.

In total, Emilio attended three different high schools then a continuation school, from which he graduated. Arts education was a hit or miss at the different schools. Some offered basic art classes while others focused strictly on STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) and provided no art classes at all. However, he remembered,

Teachers over the years have always noted my potential as an artist.

Upon introduction to LArt, Emilio was met with a welcoming staff and cohort of students.

It's very different from what I have seen organizations do with art. It wasn't what I expected at all. They are very opening and welcoming of everyone's different talents and perspectives.

He recalled,

The way I got into LArt was pretty funny. The first week I was at my continuation school we went to a fieldtrip to The Skirball Cultural Center and the LArt students were already presenting their final work so I went to see it. When I saw their presentations, I asked who LArt was and they asked if I wanted to take drawing classes [at my school] and yeah I got pulled into it all of a sudden and jumped into it.

Emilio admired the mutual understanding and respect his peers held for ways of creating. Most of all, Emilio felt special; having professional artists as teachers communicated to him that these were advanced, high level, quality classes.

They brought in this teacher who had taught at some art school down in Pasadena. So, I was surprised that someone who gets paid to work with older students comes in and does this with their free time. I was like 'whoa. This was unheard of.' I felt like I wasn't taking your normal or typical art class. It felt more like a college class. Something entirely different. That was the best thing I liked at first.

Though he grew up in a family of creatives it was not until his young adulthood that he fully appreciated the artistic work his mother and grandmother did; a graduate from the Fashion

Institute of Design and Merchandising and hairstylist for models, his mother and grandmother, respectively, had cultivated robust careers within the fashion industry. Emilio has dabbled across mediums and disciplines but found his niche in writing. He didn't credit LArt for furthering his writing skills but he does value the opportunities he has had to be exploratory with painting, photography, and digital media production.

How do I put this [pause] I'm trying to find a really nice word to describe it - I say I'm not an artist because I haven't produced that much original art. *IF* you want to count anything besides painting and all that as art I write a lot so I guess that's a form of art. I've come to LArt to find different mediums of art that I want to try. I don't want to be just a writer. I want to try painting and design but still haven't found anything else that makes me go 'YES I LOVE THIS!

Interested in developing rich, complex, inner lives of characters, Emilio takes to science fiction to explore the stranger aspects of human nature. Heavily influenced by video games and animation, he intentionally surrounds himself with musicians, writers, dancers, painters, and graffiti artists all of whom draw out the "wonderful stories and wonderful tales [he wants] to share with the world".

I like to write stories about the everyday person experiencing strange horrific things - experiences that aren't what they seem...I focus on the oddities of human nature.

He hopes that his work may resonate with folks who are confused about identity or struggling with what to believe in the world,

I try to aim my work at everyone. I try to grab the attention of a lot of different people. My goal is to sort of relate to everybody. I want people to learn from my stories that we are all human experiencing pain and uncertainty. While I won't tackle all these difficult issues directly I want to offer something real that inspires people to understand themselves more clearly.

He also chuckled while divulging his hopes to venture beyond fiction,

One thing I'm trying to do now is romantic stories but, uh, that's failing horribly.

Art for Emilio is a way to express difficult emotions amidst a turbulent and exhausting world. He commented that youth *need* an alternative like art instead of drugs or violence to cope with the realities of our existence.

Art is *very* necessary. Without art there is no way to express these difficult emotions. Especially with the world today. We have a lot of different issues. The politics, people, social media. For me it's exhausting to think about. We have to have an outlet. Art is very necessary in order for people to let it all out.

Now planning to attend a local city college to better his writing, Emilio is looking towards being a published author and maybe even a voice actor. He summed up his aspirations, "I have a knack for voices so I want to see if I can do anything with that. I don't see myself working at an office. I don't see myself doing something small." Emilio's plans are anything but small. "We all live on one planet but we all have different worlds", Emilio shared with me. Art, for him, is how we express our individual perspectives and begin to bridge and blend these different, seemingly separate, worlds. Emilio affirmed that truly, art is everything we see around us and within us. Sharing a similar philosophy about art, punk artist Ysmael was the last of my interviewees.

Ysmael

When I arrived Ysmael was in one of the LArt staff members' office sitting with two other LArt students. I quickly took in his full aesthetic: leather jacket, pins, doc marten boots, and lots of black. All of this was offset immediately by one of the largest, brightest, smiles I have ever seen in my life. Rapid fire speech and swift hand gestures pulled me into a conversation that ended up lasting just a bit over an hour.

I'm a young artist, uh, trying to develop a name and somewhat of a brand. Other than that, I'm trying to travel, get some money together to leave the country. Start a new life. Come back and forth. Unrealistic dreams maybe but at the same time I'm just trying to die happy - one of *those* types of artist dreams.

An LAUSD student up until 9th grade, Ysmael was incredibly disillusioned by the "ill equipped" teachers and stifling environment of his schools. He recalled, "Art classes were the only classes I passed." With apathetic peers and impatient educators, Ysmael felt that his education was a waste of time; no one was interested or invested in true learning. "No life", "No incentive to do good in school", "No goal" is how Ysmael described the LAUSD to me. From 9th-11th grade Ysmael lived in Oregon, a move he cites which politicized him. Upon return to the San Fernando Valley, Ysmael attended a continuation school for a short period of time before ultimately deciding to leave school. For Ysmael, graduating was easy but tolerating the "stupidity" of his teachers was the difficulty.

They really don't know how to reach their audience. I feel like you should be able inform someone and make them want to learn; encourage them when they learn a different way. Half the time you get the right answer but the wrong way and you get punished for that. They just stifle everything. I think that's a big thing about being a teacher, you have to be patient. You need to have an understanding that people's brains work at very different levels. You need to gauge that. A good teacher knows that. I know what it means to be a good teacher but I couldn't be one.

He continued,

Don't get me wrong just because I hate the institution doesn't mean education isn't important to me. I just don't find it a challenge to graduate. It's very simple to take a test to get a piece of paper to say I'm valid.

Compounded with the over-policing of student behavior, Ysmael was often labeled by teachers as disruptive or lazy, which only led to explosive verbal encounters with school faculty and staff.

You know when there's like trends going on, it's like *the* shit to do it. Like, you do it and you're immediately funny. It usually goes like someone will do that and I'll look at them and say 'you're so immature.' If you're going to drag yourself to this institution at least sit there and learn it, don't waste my time or anyone else's time. That was half the battle. A bunch of people who didn't care. I was usually hated among my peers. I remember sitting there telling someone to shut up, 'you're not funny - pay attention' and the teacher scolded *me* for telling *him* to shut up... This made me want to be disruptive and rebel. I'm not saying I was the best kid. But when you see stupidity being enabled it doesn't make you want to do more.

Discontent and frustrated by schools he felt only wanted him there for a paycheck, Ysmael struggled with finding authentic inspiration to remain in school. He explained to me that at some level he always wanted to drop out.

No one is going to miss one kid on the roster. The only reason they would care is because every head is part of the pay. I know they don't care. They don't care about keeping me there to better me, they're trying to keep their pay. It's disgusting.

Encouraged to stay by a few teachers, namely a history teacher named Natalia at his continuation school who he described as, "[a] Freedom fighter little activist lady", he continued, "She's dope. She was pretty much the best teacher I've had. She's a saint." Natalia emphasized how smart and capable he was, to which Ysmael replied, "leaving would be the smartest choice." He was told that the continuation school, which he saw as "a little tumor" on the larger comprehensive school, was his last chance. He strongly disagreed, "just because you're a dropout doesn't mean that you're a failure, it just means you have a different avenue than other people."

For Ysmael, graduating was a path to go to a university and since that wasn't his goal he didn't find it relevant to his life at the moment. He explained, "If you can get to the same place as someone else taking a different path then why not?" Describing *his* life path Ysmael said,

I see myself succeeding. I don't know what that looks like but it's feeling like success. Success is being happy. [It] doesn't matter how much money you have in your pocket if you can wake up in the morning and not be disgusted with yourself you're doing good. If you're not hating life and who you are you're doing good.

In many ways Ysmael mirrors the eclectic nature of his parents who are incredibly hard workers, sometimes holding multiple jobs at a time, yet retain a care free spirit; his father introduced him to street art while his mom was an admirer of language and fine arts.

Growing up my mom had three jobs. My dad always had a job. He's never not had a job longer than a week. They're not realistic with their thoughts but they like to have a good time. I have a brother and sister. A sister who survived two car accidents, she's a fighter. My brother is irreplaceable. We don't always see eye to eye but we're good.

He continued,

My father is a tagger. He was a graffiti artist in Pacoima, in the San Fernando Valley; It's gang affiliated. Like back in the day him and his friends loved graffiti so they would all get together, they were in a couple groups, they would just hit up. Then one day my dad got caught spray painting a freeway sign and he went to the Youth Authority. But his friends still hit up like in Venice. But growing up seeing him paint - he got into painting Mayan art - he would always let me try the spray cans. That's where I was influenced to be a graffiti artist but then I sucked at letters and I felt like couldn't be a graffiti artist after all. My mother was into Frida Kahlo and Salvador Dali. She would tell me fun facts about them here and there. She would want to go to museums but I don't find museums interesting. I like raw street art. Like an anarchist painting in the middle of a riot - *that's* art.

His primary influence, however, is from punk musicians. He stated, "Their words have paved the way for what I do." He reflected on how he was always looking to be accepted but eventually gave up on trying to fit in. He said, "My art is inspired by punk culture because I want it to be loud. I want people to look at it and think like wow that's *something* or like *that's* something?"

Punk made it okay for him to embrace being weird and to figure life out on his own.

The whole, I don't know, punk scene y'know, man. Political punk like Dead Kennedys, Bad Brains, The Subhumans, etc. The whole genre made me realize everyone hates you, no one is special, express what you're doing, try and make a mark, try and *be bold*. Richard Hell, John Lydon, Sid Vicious, old punk stars that are long and gone, it was their words that spoke to me when others were null and void.

His work is distorted and experimental. The “grim” subject matter of his art was a point of contention during his time with LArt.

I'm really random when it comes to what I do so my art reflects that. One moment I could be drawing a face then it's a bear and it's in constant flux, experimenting and evolving. When people ask me about my art I don't know how to explain it or how to define it. But defined, just different - ya, different. I like to draw things that have never been seen.

Initially viewing LArt as a “safe haven” he eventually became uncomfortable with the level of professional grooming and censorship imposed on him by the program.

It's like finally [I found] people dedicated to helping the youth focus on art. Giving them opportunities to express themselves and giving them opportunities to display their art. I got two exhibited pieces and a documentary made about me through LArt. Over time, I was about to turn 18 and they started talking to me about censoring what I do and certain things I say and stuff reflecting in my art and they were like, ‘hey don't do this, don't do that, don't' say that’

He acknowledged in good spirit that they were simply exercising their better judgement it just wasn't for him anymore. “LArt has very good people and their mission is noble. They want to provide a constructive outlet as an alternative to drugs or gangs - to make the youth want a future”, he assured me. Ultimately, Ysmael is a bleeding-heart anarchist, who desires unadulterated freedom in all areas of his life, his art especially. He stated simply, “with art, that was the one thing I was never lenient about being told what to do.” For Ysmael, art is an intrinsic part of who he is. When asked to explain the intent behind his paintings or what they represent he replied that they represent him; his art is a reflection of who he is.

Basquiat didn't give a fuck. He just wanted to put his art out there. I'm kind of in that boat. If my art makes you so inspired that you write the song that brings world peace,

kudos. I painted what I painted. You got inspired. Cheers. But I mean if my community needed an anti-corporation mural I would be with it. If they needed something else I would do it too. It's not your job to do anything for anyone. You make your art. You live. You die. It's just one of those things.

His commitment to art extends beyond his own life, though. Ysmael wants artists as a collective to be taken seriously. Reflecting on mainstream perception of artists in society he shared, “‘You’re a failure’, ‘You’re going to end up on the streets’, ‘You’re an artist? That’s your goal?’ that’s what I’ve been told since 3rd grade.”, Ysmael remembered angrily. Prompted to describe the world he is working towards he said, “[I’m] fighting for one that an artist can be an artist without being laughed at.” For Ysmael, his community isn’t just defined by race or ethnicity; he embraces misfits from all walks of life. I asked him what he looks for in friends. He responded,

Criteria: [be] hard core, down to roll...Be a black sheep. Stand out. Stand up. Fight for what you want. *If* hard times come with it, hard times come with it. Rise above.

It was clear Ysmael valued individuality but also recognized the delicate balance of collaboration. He excitedly remembered a project he is working on,

Me and my friends, some artsy people, are trying to get together and make an Instagram. You can’t grow by yourself. I’m into being an individual but if you are going to start a movement you can’t start alone.

Ysmael also had the idea to start a riot protesting Snapchat’s takeover of the historical Freakshow in Venice.

I wanted to do an anti Snapchat protest. They’re taking out culture and replacing it with mindless media...They painted the red and black building solid grey. That was a really depressing moment.

Though the idea never actualized, he assured me, “It’s like the night is still young type thing y’know.” As for the immediate future, Ysmael is focused on not overthinking it- just creating his art and living a life radically different than the standard imposed on him.

I market myself. Like let's say I'm going to Venice and I'm wearing something like a pair of pants that are half bleached and all paint splattered on the other side and someone goes 'nice pants' I'm like, 'do you want some pants like this?' and they're like, 'yea I would buy some of those' I'd be like, 'I'll make you some, here's my email - hit me up'... My canvas art, I don't carry around so it's kind of hard to sell that. But if someone asks I will send them some pics of my art and they can pick."

Ideally, Ysmael shared,

I just need a flat. Where I can paint. Live a good life. My life. [It] doesn't matter if I'm living in a shithole in New York. If I'm happy, I'm happy. If it works out it means I get to sell my art and I'm surviving off of my art. That's who I am.

Ysmael summed up his approach to life with, "Make art. Be happy. Die happy."

Chapter 5: Weaving Threads, Building Theory

In the beginning of *Precious Knowledge*, a film that documents the stories of Mexican American students in Tucson, Arizona fighting the ban of the Mexican American Studies Program, an unnamed strong opponent to the Raza Studies program commented, “They [the students] are lazy...they are culturally damaged.” Dr. Jeff Duncan, an advocate for the courses, responded by saying, “the same narrative about the deficiency of our children has run the history of public school in the U.S. We just change the way we explain our inability to engage kids.” He goes on, “I’ve never met a kid with a dysfunctional relationship to learning, I’ve met a lot of kids with dysfunctional relationship to school.” Duncan’s statement echoes Labov’s (1972) argument that the myth of deprivation diverts the attention from real defects of our education system to imaginary defects of the child.

These conversations revealed to me each student’s acute awareness of inequality - they *know* something is not quite right. Coming back to Anzalúda ’s concept of *la facultad*, these students occupy a particular social and political space that necessitates a heightened awareness of the world around them. Youth intrinsically sense when they are ignored by society (Diaz 2005:152). Which is exactly what catalyzes Latinx students to agitate, through protest and art, in an effort to be heard, seen, and understood.

Society constructs the social world through a series of agreements mediated by images, pictures, tales, and scripts (Delgado 2001:42). In telling their stories, Latinx activists²⁸ disrupt these agreements, come into knowing themselves more deeply, and actively inscribe a new truth and meaning in their culture(s). Acknowledging the realities of being poor, “ghetto”, and Brown, Josiah found music as a vehicle through which to tell his story, a story that challenges what the

²⁸ I use this language to gesture towards the unique combination of art and activism

mainstream public understands about youth like him. He builds on the legacy of rappers before him while at the same time carving out a new space for a generation of contemporary musicians who are exploring the intersections of music and technology in unprecedented ways. As the first in his family to graduate with a high school diploma, Josiah is already interrupting the cycle of generational disenfranchisement and at the same time looking towards a vision of the future in which his stories, and stories from his community, are widely shared and valued. His critique of the distance between the personal and the classroom are observed by Michelle Fine (1991) who writes that framing school and home life as separate is damaging because students, especially low-income students of color, realistically do not have the luxury of compartmentalizing the two. Perhaps Josiah's desire to "get out there" as an artist can be understood as a desire for visibility in a society that constantly renders you, and your struggles, invisible.

Ysmael also wants to "be out there". My conversation with Ysmael led me to think about Paul Willis' work, *Learning to Labor*, which explores how young boys, in Britain, who he calls 'lads', construct an alternative culture in opposition to school authority. The lads seek to make meaning within a rigid, imposed, framework by intentionally dressing, speaking, and acting in opposition to expectations that are, from their perception, passively accepted by their other peers. Similarly, Ysmael expressed great frustration with his apathetic peers and sterile classes. For the lads, and Ysmael, their tension with schooling is rooted in the strong disconnect between school and society, the latter being what the boys perceive to be "real life". They believe that what they are taught, and how they are expected to behave, does not seem to hold any "value" in the real world. For the lads, the day-to-day responsibilities and performances in school were far less important than gaining work experience and hanging out with friends. Ysmael, on the other hand, did not feel that teachers communicated a relevance of the standardized education or

degree in relationship to his artistic pursuits. In sum, it can be understood that some students feel a reclamation of their education by exiting school (e.g. non-completion) – a sort of “if I opt out of your game then I can’t lose” mentality (Tuck 2012).

While choosing to leave school was a radical choice for Ysmael, Mireya found participating in the traditional academic route as a form of resistance; a success against a system that would have preferred her to otherwise fail. A case study by A.A. Akom (2003) on young women in the Nation of Islam (NOI) provided an example of individuals classified under Ogbu’s (1998) “involuntary minority”²⁹ who achieved academic success by transforming the “burden of acting white” into an expression of resistance and ethnic pride. Pursuing her education, her art, and her career directly challenges oppressive educational structures attempting to funnel Mireya into low-skilled dispensable labor force.³⁰ Embodied in an identity that is racialized, gendered, and criminalized Mireya disrupts the internalized perceptions teachers and the school system, more broadly, project onto her.

Ultimately, there are a multitude of ways that students who experience marginalization and othering within schools express their critical resistance to oppressive structures and exert agency. Each participant has exerted agency in defining what revolutionary means to them as individuals. Yet, they do not operate alone. Emilio expressed how he found great inspiration from being surrounded by LArt students; it was not as much about the art skills or classes for him but rather the community that he found among other young creatives which allowed him to tap into the deepest reservoir of his creative energies. A key finding of Willis’ work is that

²⁹ Ogbu (1991) describes involuntary minorities racialized groups in the U.S. who were forced to become part of American society through slavery, conquest, or colonization.

³⁰ Michelle Fine (1991) writes that schools discharge, or push out, students in a business as usual fashion in which low-income students of color are not humanized and seen as dispensable.

counter-school culture is dependent on a carefully established social group. Meaning, the influence of our peers cannot be overstated when discussing the formation of counter cultures; effective countercultures are a social not individual process. Thus, we can understand these students' experiences, and their acts of resistance, as the products of their social groups - of their kinship ties.

In speaking with these four students, it was abundantly clear that from an early age they were not made to feel as though they had genuine, meaningful, and substantive support systems in the LAUSD school faculty and staff. Rather, for Mireya, Josiah, and Ysmael, it was quite the opposite; many years of being dismissed and degraded, these students developed a distrust towards their teachers going so far, as in Ysmael's case, to question the competency and legitimacy of their instructors. Consequently, these students withdrew themselves from the classroom. It is at this critical turning point that LArt attempts to intervene and reengage students to remain in school.

For these students, LArt embodies what Angela Valenzuela (1999) referred to as "authentic care". Through their words but also their pedagogical approach, LArt faculty and educators demonstrated that they were willing to get to know students on a personal level and that they were invested in students' success. The interviews attested to how in comparison to their other traditional core classes, students felt that the LArt courses encouraged true critical thinking and that the teachers held high expectations for them.

In my field observation of an LArt classroom I noted how the instructor, Carmen, met each student where they were at and attempted to cultivate a culture of excellence and rigor. The workshop coordinator, Denise, an LArt staff member present in the classroom to assist the instructor, reminded students before class, "My expectation is that everyone will work together".

Carmen pushed students to incorporate their culture into actively problem solving; the activity I witnessed charged students with the task of creating a visual symbol to represent their role in their community. Students were prompted to reflect on the following questions: “What roles do we play?”, “What masks do we wear at home, work, or school”? Students clustered together, based on previously identified shared characteristics, and began mapping out how they could best represent, for example, being a “mediator”, “helper”, “advocate” or “organizer”. Carmen reminded students to “create an art piece that speaks to your voice”, an affirmation grounded in the values embodied Valenzuela’s (1999) concept of *educación*, a more holistic sense of learning that encourages cultural understanding and care for the person.

We can also understand LArt as critical in the development, or transference, of “tools of appropriation” that assist students in successfully navigating social and political systems. As discussed in Chapter 1, Bourdieu (1973) defines cultural capital as a competence, which includes the knowledge, understanding, and practices of a dominant and socially valued culture; this competence manifests itself through networking, or what he calls apprenticeships, and education. As students progress the LArt “ladder” they become increasingly familiar with faculty and staff and have opportunities to practice their craft through internships. LArt seeks to develop transferrable skills of “hustle”, “grit”, “emotional resilience”, “authentic collaboration and the knowledge of “invisible codes” through the process of art making that will, hopefully, make students successful in any sector and thus, allow students to navigate the certain cultural codes meant to obstruct their entrance into the creative industries.

Chapter 6: Looking Back as We Move Forward

2018 is the 50th anniversary of the 1968 East L.A. Walkouts. It stands to question then, how have high schools persisted in reproducing the same unequal outcomes for Latinx youth that were protested in the 60s? What struggle continues? What has changed? How have Latinx youth as students, artists, and activators redefined themselves, culture, and community, in relation to a changing world?

At the time of the protests, Mexican American students in East L.A. were funneled into high schools with some of the worst dropout rates in the nation — 57% at Garfield, 45% at Roosevelt and 39% at Lincoln (Sahagun 2018). These rates are not nearly as drastic today and yet, I believe, it is this type of “progress” that obfuscates perceptions educators, politicians, and the public have about the realities of modern day (re: “post racial”) racism, classism, xenophobia, and sexism. I feel that Josiah said it best in his interview, “I guess you could say the school system has gotten better since then [the Walkouts] but there’s always more work to do.”

Indeed, as these four students’ *testimonios* reveal, there *is* always more work to do. Their *testimonios* cannot, and should not, be framed as representative of *all* Latinx folks or students. However, there *is* much to be learned about the insidious and pervasive influence systems of subjugation have on the lived realities of Latinx youth from hearing Mireya, Josiah, Emilio, and Ysmael’s stories. High schools, specifically in Los Angeles, despite multiculturalism or diversity initiatives fundamentally do not serve low-income Latinx students and their families because they were never meant to. Reform will always be just that – reform, because reform seeks to only change, modify, or alter what already exists. What we need, I argue, as marginalized folks, and as a society, are completely new visions of reality.

Moving with the understanding that power is decentralized it makes sense that our solutions should also be as expansive in scope as the matrices of domination that attempt to prevent our self-determination. How do we imagine and *actively* create visions of living that do not depend on the subjugation of a group or groups of people - practices of social belonging that are not reliant on statehood, borders, or existing binaries? What does it mean to truly be free? Not the present illusion of freedom that we cling to. But, to embody the truth that liberation is not a fixed quantity - it *is* abundant. Liberation, if ever truly attained, is not done so in isolation but in community. Those committed to liberation must not obscure the fact that critical consciousness is not a fixed destination but an ongoing process of learning and unlearning. With a critical consciousness we can begin to map the logic of a seemingly illogical matrix of oppression. Knowing yourself, your history, your communities - in really deep ways beyond the intellectual, I believe, is a powerful first action step towards liberation, a daily practice that Mireya, Josiah, Emilio, and Ysmael embody through their art. Each interviewee shared with me, in some variation, that art was a way to escape. I am interested in those spaces of retreat in which they are envisioning a society that allows them to be their full selves. We cannot mobilize or build anything new if we have not first imagined what that would look, feel, and sound like.

In the months during which this thesis was written I have watched alongside the rest of our nation as youth of color mobilize in protest of the anti-black, anti-indigenous, xenophobic, transphobic, militarized police state. They are inheritors of a struggle for liberation that has *been* happening and will continue to unfold. Are the young artists I interviewed, the youth protesting in the streets, or the kids creating mass social media movements any more or less revolutionary than each other or their predecessors?

The process of bringing this work to life has been the most challenging, unnerving, frustrating, tiring, beautiful, transformative, necessary, and deeply rewarding experience during my time at Vassar. I hesitate calling this a conclusion because it is not the end, not for me at least, – it cannot be. As of 2015, 4,743,372 Latinx U.S. residents 25 years and older held a bachelor's or advanced degree compared to their White counterparts who totaled at 48,858,602 people (Flores et al. 2017). The Latinx poverty rate is more than double that of whites at 21.9% and 9.8%, respectively (Flores et al. 2017). However, growing steadily, the Latinx community is expected to reach 24% of the U.S. population by 2065. The Pew Research Center also projects that in less than 50 years the U.S. population will be comprised of 78 million immigrants and 81 million will be people born in the U.S. to immigrant parents. What, then, are we doing to create a world that ensures Latinx folks, poor folks, women, children, undocumented people, Black communities, queer and trans folks, indigenous populations, and all those rendered most vulnerable to systemic exploitation, abuse, and violence have what they need to survive *and* thrive? What will we have done in the next 50 years to disrupt cycles of racism, poverty, and disenfranchisement?

I would like readers to sit with the questions I pose in this final chapter. I want readers to think about these questions while reflecting on the *testimonios* in Chapter 4; to keep them in your mind as you read, see, and hear news stories and social media posts about youth of color fighting for themselves and their communities. What I am inviting us to realize is that this work is more than an intellectual or academic exercise. I urge readers to take these questions beyond just this thesis and to hold critical conversations with each other. I ask that we commit to deeply interrogating our individual and collective histories and to gaze upon a future in the horizon that calls us to radical action *today*.

Part of being a **revolutionary** is **creating** a vision that is more humane. That is more fun, too. That is more loving. It's really working to **create** something beautiful.

– Assata Shakur

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Appendix A — Call for Participants

This is an opportunity for our students to talk about the impact of our program, and arts programming in general on their education as a whole.

Yesenia is going to conduct 30minute one-on-one interview with our students as part of her case study on LArt³¹ for her senior Educational Studies & Sociology thesis research at Vassar College.

What Yesenia Perez is looking for:

- 5-8 interviewees via alumni data base
- "I am looking for 5-8 volunteers who self-identify as Latinx/a/o and have graduated from the LAUSD to participate in 30 minute interviews as part of a case study on LArt for my senior Educational Studies & Sociology thesis research at Vassar College. Participants will be asked to reflect on their childhood/growing up in LA, experiences as students in the LAUSD, time in LArt programs, their personal and professional aspirations, and current occupations.
- Most centrally, I am looking to understand the relationships between identity formation, schooling, school dropout, and art.
- Participants are strongly encouraged to bring a sample of visual art they have created to discuss during the interview. These interviews will be audio-recorded with the consent of the interviewee.
- If you have any further questions or concerns feel free to email yeperez@vassar.edu

Interview Dates and Time Slots:

- January 10 @ 3pm
- January 10 @ 3:30pm
- January 10 @ 4:00pm
- January 10 @ 4:30pm
- January 10 @ 5:00pm
- January 10 @ 5:30pm

or

- January 17 @ 3pm
- January 17 @ 3:30pm
- January 17 @ 4:00pm
- January 17 @ 4:30pm
- January 17 @ 5:00pm
- January 17 @ 5:30pm

³¹ In the copy of these forms, Appendices A-C, the true name of the organization has been replaced with the pseudonym consistent within thesis.

Appendix B — Adult Consent Form

Primary Investigator (s): Erin McCloskey, Department of Educational Studies
Marque Miringoff, Department of Sociology

Student Researcher (s): Yesenia Perez, Vassar 2018

Title of Project: Latinx Youth Radicalism and Resistance Through Visual Art

I acknowledge that on _____, I was informed by Yesenia Perez of a student research project having to do with the following:

What the study is about: The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships between identity formation, schooling, school dropout, and art.

What we will ask you to do: Participate in a one-on-one interview with the student researcher. The interview can include questions about your childhood, experiences as a student in the LAUSD, time in LArt programs, and personal and professional aspirations. The interview will take about 30 to 45 minutes to complete. With your permission, we will audio-record the interview and transcribe the audio recording.

Your answers will be confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. To protect your privacy, in the use and discussion of findings pseudonyms will be used in place of participant names. In any sort of report we make public we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you.

Taking part is voluntary: Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. You may skip any questions that you do not want to answer or choose to end the interview at any point.

Potential Risks: Minimal emotional or psychological discomfort may be felt in response to the questions (which may be considered personal).

I am aware, to the extent specified above, of the nature of my participation in this project and the possible risks involved or arising from it. I understand that I may withdraw my participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty of any kind. I hereby agree to participate in the project.

_____ (Printed name of Participant)

_____ (Signature of Participant, must be 18 years or older)

_____ I have read the above description and give my consent for the use of the audio recordings and transcriptions of my interview, as indicated by my initials.

_____ Date

Participant email or phone:

Appendix C — Prepared Interview Questions

Interviews with Alumni:

1. Please tell me your name and give me a sense of who you are.
2. In your own words, describe the mission and work of LArt.
3. Prior to LArt did you have art classes at your school(s)? If so, how were they similar or different to LArt?
4. Growing up where did you see art and in what forms?
5. Describe your art.
6. What connections, if any, do you see between your involvement in LArt and your academic trajectory/pursuits/experiences?
7. What do you believe is the purpose of art?
8. Some people believe artists have a responsibility to society to engage in issues of their community and strive for change, what are your thoughts on this?

Interview with Artistic Director:

1. Please tell me your name and a little about yourself.
2. In your own words, describe the mission and work of LArt.
3. How did you come to work at LArt?
4. What most appeals to you about the work?
5. Tell me about the workshops, how does your team design and implement them?